

Overseas Chinese in Nevada

Island Mountain Chinatown

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Island Mountain Chinatown, 1903
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest

Courtesy Humboldt-Toiyabe Forest Service
Photo by Frau Hilda Matthey

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During the 1850s, south China and especially the province of Guangdong experienced social and economic upheavals due to the opening of treaty ports, natural catastrophes, and increased banditry. With the 1859 discovery of gold and silver in the western Great Basin, a new chance to capture the wealth of the West presented itself. Many Chinese came to this new land, which they called Yinshan or “Silver Mountain”. Here, they joined thousands of others from throughout the world, each seeking an opportunity to capitalize on the immense wealth produced by Nevada mines.

“Manny” Penrod discovered the Island Mountain Mining District in northern Elko County in 1873. Penrod, an early partner with Henry Comstock of Comstock Lode fame, found placer gold at Island Mountain and employed Chinese workers to aid in building hydraulic ditches from nearby creeks to wash gold from the soils in his placer mines.

The Chinese, who elsewhere were excluded from mining in Nevada, lived here from 1873 until around 1915. Not only miners, these Chinese residents also served the nearby Gold Creek ranching and mining community as laborers and as cooks. A Chinese mercantile store and community laundries were also located on Island Mountain’s Pekin Avenue serving Chinese, Native Americans, and Europeans-Americans. Frau Hilda Matthey, a visitor from Germany, took this photograph on a visit to her family’s mining interests at Island Mountain in August of 1903.

For more information on the Chinese in Nevada please visit:
<http://www.onlinenevada.org/articles/chinese-nineteenth-century-nevada>

